



Economic Impact Survey 2009: Food Bank Response

How current economic conditions are impacting the emergency food system served by Second Harvest North Central Food Bank

Feeding America is the nation’s largest domestic hunger-relief organization, serving an estimated 25 million low-income Americans each year through its network of 205 food banks and their 63,000 charitable feeding agencies, including food pantries, soup kitchens, and homeless shelters.

The current recession and the rise in unemployment are having a profound effect on the nation’s food banks. In early September 2009, Feeding America conducted a brief survey of food bank members to learn more about the challenges faced by food banks, their member agencies, and clients served. A total of 176 food banks participated in the survey. What we found was that 99% of all participating food banks reported increases in demand for emergency food assistance over the last year. The average increase in demand across the network from Summer 2008 to Summer 2009 was 30%. However, the increase in need for services over the last year varies across the nation, ranging from 5% in some areas to more than 150% in others. Local economic circumstances, such as plant closings, can have a significant impact on need but it is also clear that high unemployment across the nation – which reached 9.7% in August – is a critical factor in the rising need for emergency food.

It’s becoming increasingly more difficult for many food banks and their agencies to meet the needs of their clients, especially when new clients arrive all the time. Despite the fact that the nation’s food banks delivered 2.63 billion pounds of food between July 2008 and June 2009 – an increase of 21.4% over the prior year --many are struggling to meet this increase in demand.

Here is a snapshot of what Second Harvest North Central Food Bank has witnessed and reported over the past year in the community it serves.

Estimated increase in demand or need for emergency food assistance:	13% increase in households served by food pantries from January to June 2009 compared to same period in 2008.
Local factors impacting changes in demand:	We believe that high unemployment and cuts in work hours have added to our steadily growing need for food assistance. People who have never needed assistance before are finding themselves in crisis.



Critical trends contributing to increased need for emergency food:	Unemployment Underemployment Mortgage/Rent Costs Cost of Health Care
Client trends include:	More requests from existing clients More first-time users More children More employed persons
The frequency with which the food bank or its agencies had to reduce the amount of food available per person or household:	Occasionally

Additional Comments:

Unemployment in the town we are located in is 13%, well above the state average of about 9%. The taconite mining industry is almost completely shut down during this economic crisis.

A young woman came into our on-site food pantry, looked around and left before anyone could talk to her. She came back in a short time later and once again left before anyone could ask her if she needed something. Finally she got up the nerve on her third try to make it to the intake desk. She was so humiliated and afraid to ask for help feeding her kids. She had lost her job and had no where else to turn. She had always been self-sufficient and never thought she would have to ask for help to feed her family. I'm so glad we were able to help her. This story was relayed to me by the volunteers in our food shelf.

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For further information, please contact:

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